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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Presidential aspirants face off; no fireworks

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unless there is evidence, (a case) must not be pursued," Gordon said.

Escudero said when he was minority leader in the House of Representatives, the opposition tried twice to hold Mrs. Arroyo accountable for allegations raised in the impeachment complaints against her.

"My position then was the people must know the truth and that the wheels of justice should spare no one, not even the President," Escudero said.

Panlilio, for his part, said the Philippines as a country of laws, must prosecute the Arroyo family if there are evidence that they had been involved in anomalies.

"Let justice take its course," Panlilio said.

Teodoro also said the legal process should take precedence "but if they are mere speculations and do not have basis but only political harassment then I have said this, I would help my President."

Also at the forum, Panlilio, a "priest-on-leave" was asked about family planning. He said it could be discussed with the different sectors of society, including the non-Christians who might have a different view from the majority Catholics.

He also stressed that it's not his ambition to run for president and that he's willing to give way to a

more deserving candidate.

"If I find a candidate who will have positive influence, I will not even run. Perhaps, I will support that candidate because I don't have a political agenda," he said.

Teodoro said he is proud to be an administration ally and stressed he would not have accepted his job if he were ashamed of it.

When told by ANC host Ricky Carandang that his affiliation with Mrs. Arroyo could be a kiss of death, Teodoro was unfazed.

"No matter what one says for or against any administration, history will be the judge," Teodoro pointed out. Tina Monzon-Palma co-hosted the forum.

He said the Arroyo administration could also boast of a lot of achievements and that he was not afraid of being a "John McCain," the presidential candidate in the United States who was identified with then incumbent and unpopular American President George Bush, just like Mrs. Arroyo at this time. McCain lost to US President Barack Obama.

He said he is also in favor of changing the constitution through a constitutional convention. ■

GMA signs Tourism Act

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as a global tourism destination, highlighting its tourism products and services.

The Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) would now be known as the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), a corporate body mandated to designate, regulate and supervise tourism enterprise zones (TEZs) as well as develop and supervise tourism projects in the country.

Duty Free Philippines will also be reorganized and renamed the Duty Free Philippines Corporation (DFPC), a corporate body mandated to operate the duty- and tax-free merchandising system in the country.

R.A. 9593 provides that the TPB and TIEZA will each have capitalization of P250 million subscribed by the national government.

Funding for TPB will be sourced from investment earnings from the Tourism Promotions Trust; appropriation from the national

government of not less than P500 million annually for at least five years from the time of its constitution; 70 percent of the 50 percent net income of the DFPC accruing to the Department; at least 25 percent of the national government share remitted by international airports and seaports to the National Treasury.

On the other hand, the funding for TIEZA would come from 50 percent of travel tax collections; a reasonable share from the collections of the Office of Tourism Resource Generation; income from projects managed by the TIEZA; and subsidies or grants from local and foreign sources.

The capitalization for DFPC was set at P500 million and funding for its operations will be sourced from internally generated income and other receipts.

New incentives for investors

Tourism Secretary Joseph Durano noted that some new incentives for investors in the tourism sector would be provided on top of the existing ones given by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Durano admitted that there would be some revenue implications with the new incentives as he noted that investors were already happy with the existing incentives.

He said that the IRR would iron out some of the provisions of the law, particularly the transfer of supervision of some agencies such as the Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA).

Durano pointed out that the PRA would be transferred to the DOT from the DTI under the new law.

Senator Richard Gordon, the principal author of the bill in the Senate, said that the law would "equip the Tourism Secretary and tourism stakeholders with all the power, funds and tools, that if used properly will lead to an exponential growth in foreign tourist arrivals." ■

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